

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HILDA L. SOLIS

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Promoting Social Media Safety Among Children and Youth

Although social media can create positive experiences for youth, it can also pose significant risks if not used safely. In June, Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy, called for placing warning labels on social media platforms, similar to those used in tobacco products. Earlier this month, 42 state attorneys general, including California Attorney General, Rob Bonta, supported Dr. Murthy’s call for placing warning labels on social media platforms in a letter sent to Congress. This results from the growing concern of social media’s contribution to the mental health crisis among young people. It is estimated that adolescents who spend over three hours per day on social media have twice the risk of anxiety and depression symptoms. Meanwhile, almost half of adolescents indicate that social media harms their self-image. This is significant given that on average adolescents spend almost five hours daily on social media, and up to 95% use a social media platform. However, concerns with social media use are not new. In 2019, Governor Gavin Newsom signed AB 272 into law, enabling school districts to regulate the use of smartphones during school hours.

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Social media serves as an important medium by which to access information and resources, and can foster connectivity among people. Yet, studies indicate that social media can also worsen suicidal thoughts and eating disorders. Additionally, cyberbullying via social media is associated with depression among children and adolescents, with adolescent females and LGBTQIA+ youth being more likely to report experiencing incidents of cyberbullying than other groups. Notably, suicide was the third leading cause of death among Los Angeles County youth ages 10-24 between 2016 and 2020, while suicide attempts were far more common. Reducing potential social media harms, particularly among children and young adults, who are more vulnerable to its negative effects, is vital to help reduce the growing mental health crisis in this population.

The County has engaged in efforts to foster social media safety. The Department of Public Health (DPH) has developed a toolkit on Addressing Teen Mental Health Challenges, and offers resources and educational opportunities on social media safety through its Student Wellbeing Centers and classroom workshops. The DPH Peer Youth Advocates and Youth Council members are active in efforts to promote adolescent well-being, including addressing cyber-bullying and social media safety. Additionally, the Department of Mental Health provides workshops to schools on social media safety. However, while a lot of these efforts are geared towards middle school and high school students, social media is increasingly being utilized by a younger population. Currently, the County does not have standardized curricula for social media safety for children of various age groups.

There continues to be a need for more consistent messaging and information on

social media safety, that both recognizes its potential benefits and harms to better inform children and youth, parents and guardians, and school administrators. The growing concern of social media's potential impact on the mental health and well-being among children and adolescents should be matched with a growing effort to promote social media safety.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Departments of Public Health, Mental Health, and Youth Development, as well as the Los Angeles County Office of Education to report back in writing in 180 days with the following:

1. Adapted existing educational curricula and material on safe social media use for children and youth enrolled in TK-12 educational settings, in multiple languages;
2. Adapted existing materials on safe social media use for parents and guardians, in multiple languages;
3. Consistent countywide messaging on social media safety;
4. A consolidation of existing data, resources, and materials on social media safety, and use multiple strategies and sites to ensure easy access to this information; and
5. Best practices on social media safety, including smartphone use in the TK-12 population to expand on existing curricula, identified via engagement of community stakeholders and subject matter experts.

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